

Officers Board

November 10, 1943

Lt. Colonel Lowman

Commissioning of Robert E. Lang ← NOW 1st LT.  
O-2056757

CONFIDENTIAL

Attached is a recommendation for a commission for Sergeant Robert E. Lang. At Mr. Cheston's suggestion I am now bringing this to the attention of the Board. He states that if it has your approval he will, if and when it is passed on to the Director's office, personally see that it gets to General Danielson, who is handling all such cases for us.

The case is mainly based, in addition to his qualifications, on the fact that the Army ruling in the North African Theater is that cryptographic materials of the type which we use must be in the safe keeping of an officer at all times.

We have no such officer available in the Theater and no officer in the Message Center here available for the assignment. I mean just that, in that Captain Delafield is the only officer in the Washington Message Center.

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cc to: Mr. Cheston  
Capt. Delafield

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JUSTIFICATION

The supervision of OSS Message Center operations is under the Signal Corps in the North African Theater. However, the Message Center and its responsibilities is our direct responsibility. Up to now it has been headed by an Ensign who because of ill health has had to be relieved.

Sergeant Lang, with an air priority is leaving this week to take over. However, it is Signal Corps practice that the man directly charged with the operation of cryptographic systems and Message Center work must be an officer.

We have no other officer in OSS available for these duties as the only other officer heads the Washington Message Center and cannot be spared.

Recent inquiry of the Signal Corps in an effort to obtain the transfer of a suitable officer to head up the Message Center at Algiers met with no success as none were available. Even so it is much more satisfactory that we have a man who is trained and well acquainted with our own methods of operation to fill this immediate need.

The above, we believe, is conclusive proof that there is no officer available in the Army possessing the required qualifications for the assignment.

Since the Message Center is made up of Army and Navy personnel and since the necessary contacts of the Chief of the Message Center are with the Army in this Theater, we believe that the job cannot be filled by a civilian. The importance of the job to be filled can best be described by the work being done. It is as follows:

The main Message Center at Algiers handles all the OSS classified traffic to or from that point, whether to Cairo, Washington, London, and other bases or to agents and operators in the

field. It is now planned also to set up a Message Center somewhere in Italy as well as several smaller units mobile or otherwise in various advanced locations. The cryptographic practices and systems to be used between all these places are in a general way prescribed from Washington but obviously many local adaptations and even new systems must be set up and administered, perhaps on the spur of the moment, as circumstances change. These systems must all be of a type and of a degree of security sufficient to fit in with the OSS cryptographic network extending around the world. Only a man trained in OSS systems and procedures can do the job.

From the point of view of cryptographic security it is necessary that some person familiar with OSS cryptographic systems and the dangers and advantages thereof be in charge. Such person must have the character and authority to see to it that proper precautions are taken not only in the various Message Centers themselves but also by the originators of the messages. In other words, in OSS as distinguished from most Army organizations, the Cryptographic Security officer and the Chief of the local Message Center are combined in the same person. To enforce the security regulations a trained officer is necessary.

The administrative job to be done in connection with setting up the new center in Italy and the other minor bases, the movement of personnel and equipment to these places is of utmost importance. The handling of the personnel (all of which have been chosen and sent out from here) and the proper assignment of the personnel best suited to doing the various cryptographic, machine, paraphrasing and other jobs calls for a specially trained man -- one who has both the ability and the authority to handle the men and women stationed in the various widely separated locations in which they are likely to be, and who also knows the actual capabilities and weaknesses of his personnel. It is not as though we were operating with a large staff whose numbers could take the place of specialized training or abilities. On the contrary whoever is in charge will have to make the best of some 35 persons using each to the limit of his or her capabilities. The man to do this job must not only be an officer but must also be someone who knows his personnel and is a good executive.

Sergeant Lang, though not yet quite 28 has the education and the ability for this job. After graduation from Dartmouth he was appointed Graduate Manager of Non-athletic activities. In this position he was placed in the delicate position of supervising and coordinating the work of some 15 faculty directors of non-athletic organizations, all of whom were many years his senior both in years and in term of service with the college. The details of this work were carried out with the aid of a constantly changing personnel chosen from among the members of the undergraduate body. In this capacity he became involved to a considerable extent in personnel work in keeping the boys at their studies when other matters got to be too much for them and in general as a younger member of the faculty, sympathetic with the boys' viewpoint, in handling difficult cases and cases where special treatment was needed.

This background of administrative and personnel work has been of the greatest value here. Lang has handled all the administrative and personnel work for the Washington Message Center and has been in sole charge of the recruiting campaign. He has interviewed and personally selected all the personnel now working here as well as all those who have gone to North Africa.

So far as his character is concerned Lang is responsible, level-headed, excellent at the handling of personnel and at getting the most from his workers in a most friendly way and an excellent morale builder. He has foresight. Can take orders. Has an unusual ability to get along with and for that matter get his way with his superiors when necessary. This combination in a single man is in a certain sense unique and suggests that not many men from elsewhere could be found with the same varying abilities.